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ABSTRACT

The critical career development strategy of networking is being transformed by the Internet into virtual or e-networking. Virtual networking provides these advantages: it eliminates the fear of making initial contact and the stress of first impressions; it overcomes restrictions of location, time, or money; it makes responses faster and easier; and it facilitates management of large numbers of contacts. In many fields, transnational contacts are increasingly important, and e-networking opens the door to worldwide communities of interest. E-networking is promoted as a way for women and minorities to overcome limited access to informal networks. However, e-mail is poorly suited for the initial stages of establishing a shared context for discussion between people with different cultural or disciplinary backgrounds Other cautions about e-networking include typical problems of electronic communication such as casual language, spamming, and other breaches of netiquette; potential for misrepresentation; and lack of nonverbal cues. An annotated list of 24 resources is accompanied by lists of 9 networks for women, 6 networks for minority groups, and 7 other specialized networks. (YLB)

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERT

NO. 34

by Sandra Kerka

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Virtual Networking for Career Development

The critical career development strategy of networking is being transformed by the Internet into virtual or e-networking. A variety of communications technologies are helping people expand the reach and manage the growth of their personal and professional networks: e-mail; chatrooms, newsgroups, and listservs; websites of professional organizations and corporate and university alumni; personal web pages; and handheld personal data assistants.

Virtual networking provides several advantages: it eliminates the fear of making initial contact and the stress of first impressions; it overcomes restrictions of location, time, or money; it makes responses faster and easier; and it facilitates management of large numbers of contacts (Dikel 2000; Halpern 2000; Vigil 2002). In many fields, transnational contacts are increasingly important, and e-networking opens the door to worldwide communities of interest (van Hooven and Koark 2002). Special interest networks are emerging to serve specialized career needs: for example, career management and coaching services for executives (Glason 2002; Kamberg 2001); access to colleagues for isolated free-agent workers (Imel 2001); and early career research and mentoring assistance for scientists and other professionals (Agre 2002; Rubinstein 2001).

E-networking is promoted as a way for women and minorities to overcome limited access to informal networks (Knouse and Webb 2001; Kuhn 2000; Woolley 2001). According to Knouse and Webb, it can increase the similarity, size, density, and strength of networks for diverse individuals. However, Agre (2002) suggests that "e-mail is poorly suited for the initial stages of establishing a shared context for discussion between people with different cultural or disciplinary backgrounds ... Careful mixing of electronic and face-to-face communication takes on new importance" (online, n.p.).

Other cautions about e-networking include typical problems of electronic communication such as casual language, spamming, and other breaches of netiquette; potential for misrepresentation; and lack of nonverbal cues (Dikel 2000; Essex 2001; Halpern 2000). Virtual networking can waste as much as save time, so it is necessary to focus on one's goals for making contact (van Hooven and Koark 2002). As online career management becomes increasingly important (Teff 2001), lack of access can seriously disadvantage the pursuit of career opportunities (National Career Development Association 2000). Most important, networking is about building relationships, about social exchange, and technology should not be allowed to obscure human interaction or replace face-to-face contact (Dikel 2000; Essex 2001; Palmer 2002).

Resources

Agre, P. "Networking on the Network: A Guide to Professional Skills for PhD Students." 2002. <http://dlis.gseis.ucla.edu/people/pagre/network.html>
Discusses the use of electronic media for building a professional identity, how to engage professionally with people from different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds, and the use of professional networks to get an academic job and establish oneself in the research community.

Dikel, M. R. "Networking Online Helps Break the Ice." *CareerJournal*, August 18, 2000. <http://www.Careerjournal.com/columnists/perspective/20000818-fmp.html>
Describes the benefits of online networking and gives etiquette advice on using e-networks.

"E-networking to Expand Your Career Horizons." BlueSuit Mom.com, 2001. <http://www.bluesuitmom.com/career/worktips/onlinenetworking.html>
E-networking is based on the same foundations as personal networking: reaching out to an acquaintance or a friend of a friend for help. However, the ability to communicate via the Internet with hundreds of people has expanded networking opportunities.

Essex, D. "New Ways to Network." Itworld.com, April 20, 2001. <http://www.itworld.com/Career/4199/ITW010420essex/>
Networking is an ongoing process of acquiring knowledge. Online professional chatrooms, websites, and newsgroups have made the process easier, but individuals must be careful not to misuse e-networking.

Glason, P. "Lifelong Learning: Taking a Holistic Approach." 2002. <http://www.mba.hobsons.com/sections/amba_editorial/lifelong_learning.htm>
Zenith, a coaching and networking forum for senior executives, is a virtual peer group that can share information and experience and provide advice and support on business issues. It also contains information on training, learning resources, and learning "triggers"—articles, questionnaires, how-to notes, checklists—for career development.

Guy, T. "Telementoring." In *Critical Perspectives on Mentoring. Information Paper No. 388*, edited by C. A. Hansman, pp. 27-37. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, the Ohio State University, 2002. <http://ericacve.org/majorpubs.asp>
Explores online applications of mentoring for career development, including the impact of technology on the relationship and the issues of access, race, gender, and privacy in electronic mentoring.

Halpern, N. "E-Networking." *The Riley Guide*, April 28, 2000. <http://www.rileyguide.com/enetwork.html>
Presents strategies on how to develop new business contacts via networking on the Internet. It also includes links and techniques to make e-networking efforts more effective.

Imel, S. *Career Development of Free Agent Workers. ERIC Digest No. 228*. Columbus: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, the Ohio State University, 2001. (ED 452 369) <http://ericacve.org/digests.asp>
Discusses networking as a crucial career development strategy for free agent workers who are otherwise isolated from support and services.

Kamberg, M.-L. "Managing Your Career." *Women in Business* 53, no. 4 (July-August 2001): 11, 43.
To help professionals develop their careers in an uncertain market, ExecuNet.com, an Internet-based center for executive career management, suggests five steps that one should take: develop a plan, network, be prepared, enhance one's skill set, and don't panic.

Knouse, S. B., and Webb, S. C. "Virtual Networking for Women and Minorities." *Career Development International* 6, no. 4 (2001): 226-228.
Virtual networking to acquire the information, guidance, and support necessary for career success may be advantageous for women and minorities. The Internet offers access to larger numbers of diverse individuals, many specialized websites, and ways to overcome the limitations of face-to-face interactions.

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Koreto, R. J. "Consulting on the Side." *Journal of Accountancy* 184, no. 6 (December 1997): 81-83.
John Butler, a CPA in business and industry, uses his website to moonlight as a consultant. His Web activity also helps him network, which led him to the company that became his current employer, a business technology consulting company.

Kuhn, P. "Policies for an Internet Labour Market." *Policy Options* (October 2000): 42-47. <http://www.irpp.org/po/archive/oct00/kuhn.pdf>
Rather than exacerbating racial and ethnic unemployment differentials, the Internet—by providing a low-cost, more "objective," and anonymous alternative to informal networks—could in fact work to reduce racial, ethnic, and gender gaps in employment.

Lancaster, H. "Laid-Off Techies Exploit New Economy Networking." *CareerJournal*, August 21, 2001. <http://www.Careerjournal.com/columnists/careercorner/20010821-careercorner.html>
Discusses the new style of networking in the volatile high-tech sector, where workers are allied to projects, not companies, and rely on electronic contacts to find new projects and keep abreast of industry trends.

National Career Development Association. *Career Connecting in a Changing Context: A Summary of the Key Findings of the 1999 National Survey of Working America*. Columbus, OH: NCDA, 2000. (ED 450 211)
A career information digital divide may be emerging, as more people use the Internet to find help in locating a job. Those without computer skills and Internet access may be at a disadvantage in pursuing job and career opportunities.

Palmer, P. "Professional Women Share How Online Networking Has Changed Their Careers and Lives for the Better." Women in Technology, 2002. <http://www.careertech.com/articles/women/index.html>
Discusses the benefits of technical online forums, by and for women in technology, that can connect women to a community and offer practical career advice. Reports on new technologies such as handheld devices that are increasingly used for virtual communications.

Rubinstein, E. "Empowering Postgraduate Students through Online Career Mentoring." Paper presented at Postgraduate Education in Europe—Past, Present and Future, Linköpings, Sweden, May 4, 2001. <http://www.hsv.se/pgeducation/Rubinstein.PDF>
Describes Next Wave, the American Association for the Advancement of Science's weekly online publication designed to help young science professionals advance their careers.

Shortt, D. "Virtual Networking." Special to globetechnology, August 3, 2000. <http://www.globetechnology.com/woman/archive/20000803.html>
Discusses advantages of networking on the Internet and provides tips for women on creating their own virtual networks.

Spring, K. "Seeding Your Career Field. Your Career, Act II: Thriving in the New Economy." n.d. <http://www.thirdage.com/money/careers/secondact/index05.html>
A publication directed at older adults gives tips on developing and using virtual networks.

Teff, D. R. "E-Career Management Has Become a Necessity." *CareerJournal*, January 22, 2001. <http://www.Careerjournal.com/columnists/perspective/20010122-fmp.html>
E-career management involves integrating technology and the Internet into daily communications, relationships, and career planning. Most career management functions—assessment, planning, development, search, performance, and measurement—are moving to the Internet.

Tripp, S. "E-Networking: Making the Right Contacts." *Webgrrls Career Corner*, n.d. <http://test.webgrrls.com/career/advice/enetworking.phtml>
Addresses advantages of e-networking and provides advice to women on finding contacts, locating company information, and using company/industry message boards.

van Hooven, S., and Koark, A. "International Networking for Attorneys and Entrepreneurs." 2002. <http://www.womenof.com/Articles/cb32502.asp>
Presents considerations for building intercultural networks, including the need to focus goals and use proper netiquette.

Vigil, J. I. "Using the Internet to Find a Job." In *Placement Manuals® Online*. Evanston, IL: Career Recruitment Media, Inc., 2002. <http://www.placementmanuals.com/jobsearch/jobsearch-17.html>
Describes advantages of e-networking and provides guidelines for using it as a career development strategy.

Westover, J. "The Reality of Virtual Networking." 2000. <http://www.collegerecruiter.com/pages/articles/article200.htm>
Describes new web tools for virtual networking, including instant connectivity, self-branding, online communities, and virtual office services.

Woolley, S. "Get Connected." *Money*, May-June 2001, pp. 74-82.
Urges women to create "old-girls' networks" of others who can share contacts, insights, and other shortcuts to success. Presents profiles of five women's networks.

Networks for Women

Advancing Women Network: http://www.advancingwomen.com/networks.html
BlueSuitMom: http://www.bluesuitmom.com/
DigitalEve: http://www.digitaleve.com/
Home-Based Working Moms: http://www.hbwm.com
Systers: http://www.systers.org/
Webgrrls: www.webgrrls.com
Wired Woman Society: http://www.wiredwoman.com/index.shtml
Women in Technology: http://www.witi.org
Women's Information Network: http://www.winonline.org/

Networks for Minority Groups

Black Career Women: http://www.bcw.org/
Black Links: http://www.blink.com
Black Voices: http://blackvoices.com/
GlobalMECCA, Inc., The Empowerment Network for Minorities: http://globalmecca.com/
Goldsea (Asian Americans): http://goldsea.com/index.html
HispanicOnline: http://www.hispaniconline.com

Other Specialized Networks

Company of Friends: http://www.fastcompany.com/cof/
ExecuNet: http://Execu.Net.com
Freeagent.com: http://freeagent.com/Myhome.asp
Free Agent Nation: http://www.freeagentnation.com/
Guru: http://www.guru.com/
MBA GlobalNet: http://www.mbaglobalnet.com/
Portfolios.com: http://www.portfolios.com

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